

3

The history of the Red Brigades: organizational structures and strategies of action (1970–82)

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Introduction

If we look at the recent history of industrial democracies, leftist political terrorism does not appear to be a particularly Italian phenomenon. Nevertheless, Italy is the country where it has been responsible for the largest offensives and has lasted longest. After an initial period of embarrassed or negligent silence, the media and intellectuals have now focused on the affairs of underground organizations. Our knowledge of leftist terrorism in Italy has been enriched by dozens of essays on different specific objects: the life histories of militant members of underground organizations; political interaction in the cities where the phenomenon was most developed; the ideological roots of the armed struggle; the institutional conditions that facilitated the emergence of violence and so forth. The available literature, although vast, is also extremely heterogeneous from a scientific point of view.

In organizing our work, we have concentrated on a single underground organization – the Red Brigades (BR) – and reconstructed its history using secondary sources and primary trial material no longer covered by judicial secrets. Rather than offering a mere chronological presentation of the events, we intend to organize the available data around some variables in order to identify a coherent periodization of the phenomenon. In dealing with the analysis of the evolutionary dynamic

of underground organizations we have started from the hypothesis that violent action – even where it has characteristics that make it a criminal phenomenon – follows the logic of the pursuit of ends common to other types of collective behaviour.¹ We shall concentrate on the way in which resources are gathered and mobilized by the group in relation to its objectives, the characteristics of its potential recruitment base and the conditions of the external environment.

Using the theoretical material of the organization as an instrument to understand the meaning of terrorist actions,² each section will be divided into three parts: organizational structure, strategy of action and lines of interpretation. In particular, as far as the organization is concerned, we shall examine the available information relative to: organizational model (that is, degree of articulation and centralization, systems of recruitment and existence of internal factions); type of membership (size, level of organizational commitment, socio-geographic origin and political origins); socio-geographic location of the organization (with regard to the cities and social structures where terrorism has had the greatest following throughout the various periods). As far as terrorist action is concerned we shall attempt to identify and distinguish by period: its strategic aims, targets (and in relation to this, the population target of the actions), forms and location.³ At the end of each section we shall attempt to analyse the possible interpretation of terrorism in relation to its characteristics and to the conditions of the social actors, the political system and the repressive state apparatus of that particular period.

In the study presented here we have identified four distinct periods in the history of the BR: (1) the period of 'armed propaganda' (1970–4); (2) the 'attack on the heart of the state' (1974–6); (3) the 'strategy of destruction' (1977–8); and (4) the military confrontation with the state for survival of the organization (1979–82). It is important to stress that the periodization is primarily in relation to the internal characteristics of the underground group (organization and action); and only some hypotheses are put forward with regard to the relationship between internal development and external conditions. In the presentation we shall try to focus on the important questions for which no answers have yet been found and the most important directions that historical and sociological investigation should take.

3.1 The period of 'armed propaganda' (1970–3/4)

In the first phase of their existence – 1970–3/4 – the activity of the Red Brigades was limited to the two major industrial cities of northern Italy, Milan and Turin. The actions of the organization – as regards objectives and interventions – appear to reveal the intention to maintain a constant link with the interests of a broader political and trade-union movement that was developing during the period. In this sense the BR presented

themselves as the extreme fringe of a broad – but certainly not homogeneous – collective protest.

3.1.1 The organization: opting for clandestinity

The first actions attributable to the BR date back to the autumn of 1970 but – in the opinion of the scholars working in this area – the history of the main terrorist organization is rooted in the students' movement of the 'hot autumn' of 1968 and 1969. Without dwelling too much on what is already well-known,⁴ we should nevertheless recall that the origins of the BR are to be found in the *Collettivo Politico Metropolitano* (Political Metropolitan Collective (CPM)), formed in Milan in September 1969 with the support of – among others – Trent University students and members of various grassroots worker organizations (in particular, those of the big factories Pirelli, Sit Siemens and Alfa Romeo). It is widely believed to have been an assembly organized by the CPM at Chiavari in 1969 that led to the decision to make the 'operational transition' to the armed struggle. Until the summer of 1970, however, the political interventions of the group apparently remained within the limits common to many collectives generated by the events of 1968. In fact, with the aim of extending the conflicts originating from within the factories and educational institutions to the entire society, the CPM faced – initially without any particular emphasis – the issues of 'insurrection' and of the use of violent forms of action. The debate on the armed struggle became more important and even started to be translated into concrete choices when some militants of the CPM united with a group of ex-members (*fuoriusciti*) of the Reggio Emilia section of the FGCI (*Federazione Giovanile Comunista Italiana*), to found *Sinistra proletaria* (Proletarian Left). In January 1971, a newspaper of the same name proclaimed the need to 'entrench the principle that there is no political power without military power in the fighting proletarian masses, to educate the proletarian and revolutionary left to the resistance through partisan action, to the armed struggle'.⁵ The publication of *Sinistra proletaria* subsequently ceased, but in April of 1971 another periodical traceable to the group *Nuova resistenza* (New Resistance) started to publish interviews with Palestinian and Latin American guerrillas, articles on armed European groups and communiques from the BR and the *Gruppi Armati Proletari* (Proletarian Armed Groups, (GAP)). By the time that this newspaper too ceased to exist – little more than a month later – the BR had already become an autonomously structured organization.

BR activity was initially concentrated in Milan and focused primarily on the major factories, where the contradictions were more manifest and the conflicts more acute. The choice of the location for intervention is explicitly motivated in the first of the organization's documents. In contrast to the GAP which referred to partisan resistance in the mountains, the BR declared that their aim was the 'constitution of

worker nuclei in the factories and neighbourhoods of the industrial poles and in the metropolitan areas where insurrection and exploitation are most concentrated'.⁶

Meanwhile in Rome a short-lived spontaneous group was set up – which carried out various actions aimed at neo-fascist targets in the name of the BR between 1970 and 1971 – the BR attempted to extend their sphere of influence on the national territory. In 1972 it established a base in Turin. It was obviously Fiat that – with the symbolic importance of the revolt of young immigrant workers – attracted the particular attention of terrorists. Significantly, BR activity was then extended to another major industrial pole, Mestre.⁷

Given the need to find receptive ground for the initial wave of recruitment, the BR concentrated on those factories in which autonomous groups had most developed during the preceding years and where criticisms of the trade-union leadership had been most harsh. It was not by chance that the first distribution of leaflets took place at the Pirelli plant where the radical *Comitato Unitario di Base* had a certain following and at Sit Siemens where the *Gruppo di studio operai-impiegati* was set up on the extreme positions of *Gruppo di Studio Impiegati*, which had organized the first strike of technical employees.⁸

It is clear that the organizational structure of the BR changed over this period, the main transformation being the transition from semi-clandestinity to complete clandestinity. The initial practice of 'double militancy' (*doppia militanza*) – a clandestine organization coupled with the public political activity of its members – did not survive the first tests. In May 1972 the group was subject to arrests and searches. The *brigatisti* were forced to recognize the impossibility of simultaneously carrying out 'double level' activity, i.e. mass political work and underground work. The clandestinity of some members became a concrete problem at this time. Whereas until that time, only the 'tactical' and 'defensive' aspects of clandestinity had been taken into consideration, the BR now began to talk of the 'strategic scope' of clandestinity. Thus, an internal BR document written during this period states that:

Clandestinity is a necessary condition for the survival of the military offensive of the political organization that operates within the imperialist metropoli. Operating underground allows a marked tactical advantage over the class enemy who is instead exposed in his person and in his installations.⁹

At this point the distinction between 'regular forces' and 'irregular forces' becomes fundamental. Regular militants are those who 'work' full-time for the organization and live in clandestinity under false names even when they are not wanted by the police. Irregular militants are those whose clandestinity is limited to being a member of the organization and who live – apparently – lawfully, are normally employed and carry out lawful political activity.

On the logistic level, after the 1972 arrests, the BR were structured according to totally new criteria, seeking a better level of 'cover' and operational security. The organization acquired various properties and equipped them as 'bases'. Around each base revolved a group of people responsible for studying the various local situations, for information-gathering and for the formulation and implementation of criminal plans as they were decided upon.

Given the limited size of the BR until 1974 and the scarce territorial diffusion of action, we can say that the organizational model at this stage was still rough and experimental.¹⁰ Nevertheless, we cannot deny the constant force within the organization to adapt such structures to changing circumstances. Thus, in addition to the *colonne* (territorial organizations linked to various *brigade*), the *fronti* were founded with the aim of politically centralizing the various sectors of intervention. First of all there was the 'logistic front' – with specific responsibility for the provision of arms, bases, car number-plates and documents – and the 'large factory front' or *fronte di massa* (mass front).¹¹ In fact, the control of the organization remained in the hands of its founders; in the meantime (1972–3) a new organism was set up in the form of the Executive Committee, responsible for directing and coordinating the activity of the *fronte* and the *colonne*.

A last important element in the analysis of the organization is the sociological characteristics of its members. Many *brigatisti* were recruited from within groups on the extreme left. The founders come from – as we have said – the Milan collective, *Sinistra proletaria* and from a group of ex-members of the Reggio Emilia FGCI. Among the Milan members, many – including Renato Curcio and Margherita Cagol – had been part of Marxist-Leninist groups, whereas the Emilians often came from a militant background in the PCI (such as Prospero Gallinari and Alberto Franceschini), or trade-union movement (Tonino Paroli). As regards social background, BR members do not seem to be very different from those of other political groups on the extreme left. Some militants did come from the middle or upper classes or the petit bourgeoisie, but many members of the historic nucleus (*nucleo storico*) came from working-class families or from a modest social background.

One interesting aspect of the BR is the organization's recruitment process. In this first phase particular attention was paid to small groups of the extreme left that seemed a more 'promising' source of 'proselytes'. Thus it is also thanks to the contacts made with the *Collettivo di Borgomanero* (Borgomanero Collective) that a nucleus of *brigatisti* was formed which then operated within the Turin *colonna*. The *Sinistra Proletaria del Lodigiano* – which then set itself up as *Collettivo Politico La Comune del Lodigiano* (based in Casalpusterlengo) – provided other recruits to the Milan *colonna*.¹² Useful for understanding the process of expansion of the BR during this period is therefore the reconstruction of contacts (often based on personal ties) that the terrorist group managed

to make with political collectives which – on the basis of their ideology and theory of action – were not very different from many similar organizations born in the same period.

3.1.2 Action: the focus on factory problems

The type of actions carried out by the BR in the period under examination mirrors the needs of an organization that has to face up to the initial problems of establishing itself. Thus they avoided forms of excessively violent action that might have provoked an immediate rejection by the base to be won over. Interventions were most often where the chance of recruiting militants was greatest, i.e. large factories in industrial cities of the north. During this phase there were also numerous actions against extreme right-wing targets. It is probable that (beyond the ideological motivations) this choice was oriented to the need to justify the use of violent forms of action with a social base more willing to accept less-orthodox instruments of intervention in the anti-fascist battle rather than in factory negotiations.

The choice of the armed struggle was initially justified, primarily as a need to defend the organization against the threat of authoritarian reactions. This theme was accompanied and eventually substituted by that of the massive restructuring by which capital – according to the BR – would attempt to reabsorb the converted worker. Faced with the rejection of reformism by the proletariat on the one hand and the contradictions inherent in the development of imperialism on the other, wrote the *brigatisti*, the bourgeoisie had to 'reorganize the entire power apparatus to the right',¹³ seeking to regain control over the labour force by means of the 'growing despotism of capital, a progressive militarization of the state and class conflict, and the intensification of repression as a strategic fact'.¹⁴ In the factory the reactionary plan was expressed by 'the interweaving of two long-established and coexisting tactics: the technical restructuring of production and political persecution'.¹⁵

In this situation BR actions were oriented toward a sort of armed support of the trade-union battle. The organization sought to intervene in major factory summits, with provocative actions and 'exemplary' gestures intended to demonstrate that 'the *padroni* are vulnerable as individuals' and that the 'armed workers' can defend their victories while the hesitations of the PCI would only lead to defeat. In relation to these functions the BR defined themselves as:

groups of armed propaganda whose fundamental task is to gain the solidarity and support of the proletarian masses for the Communist revolution ... to reveal the most hidden power structures and the conniving between power groups and/or apparently separate institutions.¹⁶

It is moreover stressed – and it is a characteristic peculiar to the first phase – that:

the action of the BR is therefore always in relation to the inescapable objectives of the mass movement ... It is therefore necessary to pay the utmost attention so that the BR do not tend to constitute themselves as the 'military wing of the masses', [so that] they do not substitute themselves for them [the masses] during the struggle. Their task is in fact to stimulate the movement with action, forcing it to channel itself within the strategic prospect of the people's war, developing its strength, restoring security and renewing trust in its capacities.¹⁷

Simultaneously, however, the BR supported the belief that soon became 'official' BR policy: 'that class autonomy is aggregated within the armed struggle and not the other way around, because only the armed struggle expresses class power'. In the *Autointervista* (self-interview) of September 1971, the BR presented a sort of general programme in which – without denying the belief that some forms of struggle would emerge spontaneously from the 'class movement' ('organization of self-defence, initial underground work, direct action, etc.') – the need to pass from this 'necessary tactical phase' to the 'strategic phase of the armed struggle' is established. In order to make this transition the BR needed to 'realize two fundamental conditions: (1) to compete with power at all levels (freeing political prisoners, carrying out death sentences against the police, proletarian expropriations, etc.) and to show that they knew how to survive these levels of conflict; (2) to generate an alternative form of power in the factories and the working-class neighbourhoods'.¹⁸ The history and documents of the BR in the successive years demonstrate the constant effort of the group to realize these two conditions, with the slogans on the need to 'carry forward the attack on the heart of the state' and to construct the armed party (*Partito Comunista Combattente*, PCC) as a structure of 'alternative power'.

The desire of the BR to link themselves to a broader level of social conflict is demonstrated in the choice of the targets and the forms of intervention. The targets of the main actions are all in some way connected to the factory. The first series of actions attributable to the BR took place in 1970 at the Pirelli works, while the first BR attack took place at the Sit Siemens plant – where the initial contacts were probably greater. It was at the time of the negotiation of the annual employment contract in the autumn of 1972 that the terrorist group moved from Milan to Turin. BR targets were primarily the managers most in contact with the working-class base and right-wing trade unions. Attacks were often carried out against personnel managers, security staff and heads of sections whose 'responsibility' for the repression of the workers' struggle was more immediately identifiable. In the autumn of 1970, for example,

attacks were made on the cars of the central personnel manager at Sit Siemens and on the head of security and head of personnel at Pirelli Bicocca. This sort of activity continued throughout the period. Numerous arson attacks were carried out on the cars of exponents of *SIDA*, the *giallo* trade-union in the car industry,¹⁹ and raids on the headquarters of the association. Given that the restructuring in the factory took place – according to documents distributed by the BR – using fascists as instruments of repression in the workers' struggle, the activity of the terrorist group was directed in particular against the right-wing trade-union, CISNAL. It was subsequently extended in general to include individuals and organizations of the extreme right.²⁰ In this way the BR were also able to pursue their objective of spreading propaganda to a broader social stratum.

With regard to the choice of objective, we should stress that in order to maximize the positive response of the group at which the propaganda was directed, the terrorists paid great attention to levelling accusations against the victims for their supposed 'crimes'. This is clear if we examine the four kidnappings carried out by the BR between 1972 and 1973. The first kidnap victim was the director of Sit Siemens, Idalgo Macchiarini, who was accused of a 'particular anti-worker rigidity' in factory negotiations. The second kidnap victim was the provincial secretary of the metalworkers' section of CISNAL of Turin, Bruno Labate, who was charged with employing right-wing thugs at Fiat. An internal document listed the 'anti-worker responsibilities' of the third kidnap victim, the director of Alfa Romeo, Michele Mincuzzi. The last kidnap victim was the head of personnel at Fiat, Ettore Amerio, who was named by Labate – or at least so the BR claimed – as the person responsible for keeping records on trade-union militants at the Turin factory. The actions were moreover justified by a practical objective: the 'trials' of kidnap victims and the documents stolen during raids, explained the *brigatisti*, helped the BR to amass information on the structure of repression in the factory, the restructuring processes and the instigators of various episodes defined by the BR as acts of provocation. Information extorted in this way was immediately 'exposed' to the unaware working class in the form of leaflets and documents.

We should finally point out that the development of the BR towards the adoption of more specifically terrorist forms of action (which go beyond the threshold – common to other groups of the extreme left operating during the same period – of generic commitment to violent techniques) came about gradually. In fact in its first two years of action, BR violence was directed exclusively against property. Arson was the most widespread form of action, while the BR indignantly rejected the accusation of destroying finished products. Between 1972 and 1974 raids took place – generally lasting only a few minutes – on the headquarters of the MSI, CISNAL and *Unione Cristiana Imprenditori e Dirigenti*, (UCID), a pressure group of managers and entrepreneurs. The first

attack directed against an individual took place in the spring of 1972 with the kidnapping of Macchiarini, followed in 1973 by the three other kidnappings referred to above.

In other words, in the period under review the BR went through a preparatory stage, 'in view of the strategic phase of the armed struggle'²¹ of which the Amerio kidnapping (lasting eight days) was a first example. With this crime the organization appeared to be pursuing more ambitious objectives. At this point in time we are faced with a criminal enterprise able to diffuse its message at the national level and beyond. The message was no longer aimed at a limited circle: now the interlocutors were Fiat (that is to say the summits of economic-political power as far as Italy is concerned) and the entire working class. The leaflets avenging the Amerio kidnapping, already spread by the mass media, were in fact distributed clandestinely in the factories of many cities: Turin obviously, but also Milan, Genoa, Venice, Porto Marghera, Bologna, Piacenza and Florence. The Amerio kidnapping, moreover, does not fall into the category of 'exemplary' actions that have no additional relevance once committed. It was a prolonged action with which the organization wanted (or claimed to want) to obtain something else – the suspension of the *cassa integrazione guadagni* (wage guarantee fund) then used by Fiat.

3.1.3 Lines of interpretation: the escalation of violence

Among the interpretations put forward to explain the birth of terrorism in Italy, three deserve consideration in relation to this first period of BR activity.

The first links the emergence of terrorism to the history of collective movements. The birth and the first actions of the BR took place during the life of a protest movement that was certainly not yet declining. Although it is true that the movement – considered as a studentesque utopia – tended towards crisis, the student protest during this period spread from one city to another, reaching the south of Italy and being reinforced in the secondary schools. The activities of the student groups soon extended to take in the 'workers' struggle'. Thus, between 1969 and 1970 groups emerged which sought to generalize the specific conflicts and to transform 'anti-authoritarian impulses' into 'anti-capitalistic actions'. Conflict in the factories went through a particularly bitter period. In many factories the 'hot autumn' broke down the barriers after years of repression. New, often radical forms of struggle also appeared.

The growth of terrorist groups at this point during the life of the protest movement may represent one of the outcomes (certainly greatly distorted) of collective tensions. During this phase the BR resembled many other groups that had been created – in other countries – on the fringes of the protest movements at the end of the 1960s: the German *Rote Armee Fraktion* (RAF), the Japanese Red Army, the US Weather

Underground and *Nouvelle Résistance Populaire* in France. Like these groups the BR were clandestine organizations generated from within a protest movement. It was this protest movement that inspired them – at least at the beginning of their activity – to establish the targets to be attacked and to adopt forms of action they then took to their extremes. Like the other groups, the choice of the armed struggle taken by the BR led to a progressive separation from the collective movements that had generated them and to a gradual, definitive abandoning of the logic of political intervention in favour of more extreme forms of the militarization of conflict.

The second hypothesis emphasizes the inability of the state to provide adequate solutions to the protest. The cry (frequently made in BR documents, but also found – albeit with different characteristics – in the ideology of the GAP) to defend against the reorganization of the apparatus of state repression is mixed with the fear of a possible *coup d'état*. Over and above the frequent references to the Piazza Fontana bombing, the writings of the BR often refer to plots for authoritarian *coup d'état* (*complotti golpisti*): the attempted *coup* by Valerio Borghese and the *Rosa dei Venti*.²² The destructive manoeuvres of the right are often cited to justify the need for the armed struggle. Street demonstrations often became bloody battles with the forces of law and order and the radicalization of the clashes facilitated the diffusion of the ideology of violence. On the other hand, the Rumor government and the centre-right governments of Andreotti and Malagodi appeared unable to guarantee or reinforce public trust in state institutions.

The third hypothesis is that in this period the state apparatus was unable to deal with the struggle against terrorism on the basis of a sufficient knowledge of the phenomenon in all its components. While we still discuss the entity of the repressive pressure exercised on groups of the extreme left, the BR – practically up until 1974 – were in fact undervalued. However insufficient it may be in explaining the diffusion of terrorism in its multiple origins, it is certain that the greater or lesser efficacy of the state response was a determining factor in the reinforcement of the phenomenon.

3.2 The attack on the heart of the state (1974–6)

Three important characteristics emerge during this period that began with the kidnapping of Mario Sossi and finished at the end of 1976: the terrorist organization sought a national dimension; the actions against targets outside the factory became more frequent and revealing; and the development of forms of action using typically terrorist instruments was accentuated and perfected.

3.2.1 The organization: the national dimension

The first improvement – indispensable for a terrorist organization that has

set itself the task of transforming the entire state structure – was the acquisition of a national dimension. In the Sossi kidnapping the BR, employing a tactic already used in the management of the Amerio kidnapping, sought to demonstrate they were entrenched in different territorial contexts: the action was avenged and propagandized in various central and northern Italian cities. As regards duration and characteristics, the action took on as its interlocutor the entire national public opinion.

In reality, the organization was still substantially centred on the Milan and Turin *colonne*,²³ while the structures created in the Veneto were being reinforced: but not even in Genoa was there a *real colonna* (and in fact the Sossi kidnapping was the work of militants brought in from other cities, given that *in situ* the BR at that time could only rely on the support of a few individuals). Only after the abduction of the Genoan judge (to face the 'problem of the state' better in the future) was the decision taken to 'start up an intervention' in Rome.²⁴ In the meantime the fusion of the BR and the *Nuclei armati proletari* (Armed Proletarian Nuclei, (NAP)) – whose actions were aimed at the poorest sections of the southern population – was going ahead (it was almost complete at the beginning of 1976). Soon, however, the rapid defeat of the latter slowed down BR's ambitions to extend the process of armed propaganda to central and southern Italy. In particular, expansion in central Italy,²⁵ (where small industry and the service sector predominate) and the south (where the proletariat is mostly made up of the socially marginal strata of the big cities) seemed hardly feasible for an organization 'conceived' in terms of the major industrial zones of the north.

The desire of the *brigatisti* to entrench their activity in a broader territorial context is mirrored in a greater centralization and compartmentalization of the organization. It is probable that the development of clandestine groups inevitably pushed them towards this type of organizational transformation. The 1975 'Resolution' made by the Strategic Direction stressed the need to move toward the construction of the *partito combattente*, defined as a 'party of fighting cadres ... [the] advanced division of the working class and thus a distinct and organic part of it'.²⁶ As explained in another document:

In the immediate future, the fundamental aspect of the question is the construction of the fighting party as a real interpreter of the political and military needs of the 'objectively' revolutionary class stratum and the articulation of fighting organisms at the level of classes on the various fronts of the revolutionary war.²⁷

The structure adopted by the organization during this phase is described in a leaflet found in a BR hideout in Piacenza in October 1974 and entitled, 'Some questions for the organizational debate'. It reaffirmed the need for clandestinity and the distinction between 'regular' and 'irregular' forces in that the former 'consist of the most aware and

willing cadres produced by the armed struggle', while the basic task of the 'irregulars' is to 'win popular support for the organization, to construct the centres of articulation of revolutionary power'. Nevertheless, the relationship between the two components was not hierarchical.²⁸ Subsequently the Strategic Direction was proposed – a sign that it had not been previously realized²⁹ – in the 1974 document cited, where we read that:

At the beginning of our history there was a nucleus of comrades who, operating revolutionary choices in the battle, won an undisputable vanguard role. This historic nucleus brought the organization to this point, subjecting – as far as possible – every basic choice, victories and defeats, to discussion among the comrades of the regular and irregular forces. Now, with the growth of the organization [in terms of] its influence, complexity and political and military responsibilities, this historic nucleus is not enough. We have had to redefine and broaden the total executive cadres of the organization. It is proposed that, following discussion with the comrades, a revolutionary council will be formed that gathers together and represents all the pressures and revolutionary energies developed in the *fronti*, the *colonne* and the irregular forces. This council will be the highest authority of the BR.³⁰

The Strategic Direction thus took on tasks such as the formulation of political policy line, the passing and application of the laws governing the internal life of the group and budget management. It also named the Executive Committee, which was responsible for the day-to-day government of the organization.³¹

During this period a third *fronte* ('for the struggle against the counter-revolution') was added to the two existing ones (factory and logistic). This front was created to bring the BR offensive to the 'heart of the state' (the Sossi kidnapping represents the first action in this new direction).

At this point, the organizational structure of the BR appeared to be well-defined according to a precise model: but we must immediately stress the gap that existed in reality between theory and praxis. In theory, the organization was supposed to consist of an *hierarchically organized vertical structure* (*brigata-colonna-esecutivo*) and a *horizontal structure* (the *fronti*), characterized with respect to the specific competences of individual militants (factories, etc.). Again, in theory the work of the *fronti* should have been continually to analyse the sectors within their competence and to transform this knowledge into possible proposals for 'politically and socially motivated campaigns'. It was then the responsibility of the Executive Committee to make this information executive by organizing the campaigns concretely and delegating them (on the organizational level) to the individual *colonne*.³²

In practice, however, this type of functioning was blocked by internal friction and resistance. In fact, the theoretical model of the *fronte* (on the basis of which the worker *brigatista* at Fiat was supposed to discuss and

decide with the worker *brigatista* at Alfa, etc.) turned out to be irreconcilable with the dominating hierarchical structure based on the *colonne*. Above all, this conflicted with the principle of the compartmentalization of organization into *brigata* and *colonne*. The outcome was that the logistic front was limited to being a mere branch specializing in the service problems and no longer functioning as a proper front; while the mass front ended up by only existing on paper. To sum up, the organization was increasingly characterized by the imposition of a centralized and oligarchic bureaucracy. It was precisely these issues (allowing the withering away of the *fronti* and the imposition of a suffocating 'bureaucratic centralism') that gave rise to the bitter controversy that broke out at the end of the 1970s (see section 3.4.1) between the executives of the organization, on the one side, and the 'imprisoned comrades' who made up the so-called 'historic nucleus' and the various dissident groups that emerged within the BR, on the other.

The limited number of new militants recruited by the BR in this period came from small groups of the extreme left, some of them based in the big factories in the north where the BR concentrated their propaganda activity.³³ Such transitions occurred in the context of the crisis of some groups of the New Left such as *Potere Operaio* and *Lotta Continua* – and of the strengthening of the area of *Autonomia Operaia* (Worker Autonomy, (AutOp)), as a result of the process of 'autonomization' of the base committees and worker collectives in the big factories from the management of the New Left.³⁴ It was partly in this climate of growth, or at least improved organization, for the most radical components of the workers' movement that the BR found the right conditions for a new wave of recruitment. It is useful to remember that a substantial quota of BR recruits were workers.

A final point to be taken into consideration in evaluating the potential force of the organization during this period is the action of the state apparatuses in the struggle against terrorism. If the management of the Sossi kidnapping, according to many, increased the area of 'non-rejection' toward the BR,³⁵ it was, however, precisely following this episode that the state began to perceive the full force of the terrorist threat and coordinated the anti-terrorist structures in the struggle against the BR. The energy with which the repressive apparatus of the state faced the struggle against terrorism had two effects: on the one hand it pushed the BR toward an accentuation of the military aspects of defence, noticeably lowering the chances of the latter to expand its contacts in the factories; on the other hand, the ranks of the regular militants were upset by a series of arrests that brought the organization to the verge of collapse. The infiltration of a covert agent (*frate mitra* 'brother machinegun') and controls carried out on house occupant-owner registration led to the discovery of many BR hideouts and to the arrest of a great many militants.³⁶ It is a known fact that in the first half of 1976 the BR could only count on around ten effective members still at

liberty, leaving the organization to face a profound period of crisis that could have been definitive. It was precisely at this time, however, that the restructuring of the repressive apparatus of the state, which had been organized following the Sossi kidnapping, substantially reduced the state's ability to deal with terrorism.³⁷

3.2.2 Action: the confrontation with the state

During this period the activity of BR terrorist groups was subject to important changes: targets became more 'political', and a 'militaristic' tendency – in stark contrast to the alleged 'populist' orientation of support for the mass struggle – began to predominate in the management of BR actions. We also witnessed the progressive barbarization of the forms of action. Important innovations primarily concern the guiding 'logic' underlying terrorist action: interventions shifted from the factory to more directly political objectives, and away from 'armed defence' against an alleged 'authoritarian regression' to an attack against the so-called '*neo-golliste* authoritarian attempts to change democracy',³⁸ while a substantial amount of organizational resources were monopolized in the confrontation with the repressive apparatus of the state.

In this period, the greater part of the victims were still chosen from the milieu of the factory; in avenging such actions the BR stressed (often with an unscrupulous twisting of the truth) those aspects that best lent themselves to the theme of struggle against the exploitation of the working class. During this period, attacks struck – among others – Vincenzo Casabona, director of personnel at Ansaldo, 'accused' of having organized the restructuring of the company; Luigi Solera, a doctor working at Fiat, 'suspected' of having allowed questionable dismissals on the pretext of absenteeism; a head of personnel at Fiat Mirafiori, Giuseppe Borello, 'responsible' for having endorsed dismissals for bad performance; and the director of Singer, Enrico Boffa, 'defined' as the main instigator of the decision to close the Leini plant. Actions were also carried out against trade unionists of *CISNAL* (right-wing trade union) and members of the *SIDA* with the clear objective of gathering consensus; the dates of the actions were often chosen to coincide with the crucial periods or deadlines in the trade-union struggle.³⁹ More than in the past, however, the action began to take into consideration the 'political' level of the capitalist system.

The BR tried to give an ideological justification to the shift of attention to more directly political targets. State intervention in the economy was defined as an attempt to combat the lowering of the profit rate: in the face of the crisis, state institutions would be assigned the task of raking-in the social value added for the multinationals. In the 1975 Strategic Resolution the BR wrote that:

The state takes on in the economic field the functions of a large bank in the

service of great imperialistic multinational groups. It is the direct expression of the big imperialist multinational groups, with a national pole. The state becomes, that is, the specific function of the capitalist development in the multinational phase; it is the imperialist state of the multinationals.⁴⁰

The pursuit of new and more 'political' objectives was presented as a response to the manoeuvres of the owners:

If in the factories *Autonomia Operaia* is sufficiently strong and organized to be able to maintain a permanent state of insubordination and to win a permanent space for power as it grows, outside the factory it is still weak to the point of being unable to put up resistance to the forces of counter-revolution. For this reason the forces of the counter-revolution tend to shift the main contradictions [to] outside the factory. One must respond to the strategic encircling of the workers' struggle by extending the revolutionary initiative to the vital centres of the state; this is not a voluntary choice, but an indispensable choice to maintain the offensive in the factory too.⁴¹

Outside the factory, the target of action was frequently the DC (*Democrazia Cristiana*, Christian Democratic Party): held to be the body primarily responsible for the authoritarian *neo-gollista* plan for institutional reform, of which the BR talk at length in their documents. 'This plan,' they wrote again taking up a theme much discussed at the time, 'aims at the transformation of the republic born out of the Resistance in the sense of the creation of a presidential republic'.⁴² Given that the realization of this programme would have implied a 'rigid control of social forces' and a 'growing militarization of power', the BR talked of a 'counter-revolutionary adjustment': 'the counter-revolutionary initiative' – they maintained – 'is today taken on in the first person by a power bloc within the state: it is above all against this force that we must launch our hardest attacks'.⁴³

Activity planned to 'counter' *neo-gollista* plans included the raids on the headquarters of the *Centro Resistenza Democratica* of the right-winger Edgardo Sogno and the *Centro Studi Don Sturzo* of Turin, headed by a political figure from the right of the DC, Giuseppe Costamagna. The BR also injured the leader of the DC councillor group in Milan, Massimo De Carolis.

Besides the objective to 'beat the DC, organized centre of reaction', the resolution of the directive organism stressed the need to 'attack the state at its weakest links, dislocate its centres, free the comrades in prison, carry out reprisals against the judiciary of the regime'. Hence the BR planned and carried out the kidnapping of the magistrate, Mario Sossi. But the well-placed blows that the forces of law and order began to inflict on the BR forced the organization to defend itself. The BR were forced to plan activity connected with problems inside the organization, which did not reflect the needs of the social struggle and the level of awareness of the working-class base they wanted to influence. In addition

to premeditated actions (attacks on *carabinieri* barracks, raids on the offices of the district inspectorate of the Institutions of Prevention and Punishment in Milan and the Sossi kidnapping) we must add, to complete the balance of this type of activity, the deadly gun battles that members of the BR engaged in with the forces of law and order to avoid arrest.⁴⁴

Finally, the forms of action were subject to major transformation. On the one hand they continued to use types of intervention already experimented with in the preceding period: attacks on the cars of intermediate company cadres and members of the rightist trade-union hierarchy; raids on the headquarters of political and professional organizations (presented as information-gathering activity to uncover the hidden articulation of repression); political kidnappings (such as those of Sossi and Casabona) that served simultaneously to gather information and to 'punish' the most exposed 'reactionaries'. On the other hand, in addition to these elements of continuity, there is a major innovation linked to the use of arms. In the preceding period, machine-guns and pistols were only used as a means of intimidation to immobilize the public during a raid or to threaten the victims during a kidnapping. Whereas in this second period, arms were used directly against individuals in order to wound and kill. The BR carried out and claimed responsibility for five actions of premeditated injury.⁴⁵ The use of arms against individuals was probably a threshold beyond which BR fanaticism no longer recognized possible limits to striking the good of physical integrity. The first cases of woundings are recorded alongside the first assassinations. In Padua on 17 June 1974 a raid on the provincial headquarters of the MSI (*Movimento Sociale Italiano*, a right-wing neo-fascist party) ended with the killing of two right-wing militants. Responsibility for the assassination was claimed by the BR but it was presented as a simple 'work accident'. Nevertheless, in the leaflet claiming responsibility for the two homicides, the BR wrote that 'the revolutionary forces from Brescia onwards are legitimate to respond to fascist brutality with the armed justice of the proletariat'.⁴⁶

In addition, until the assassination of the General Public Prosecutor of Genoa, Francesco Coco, and two members of his bodyguard, the killings had not been premeditated but took place – as we have seen – during clashes with the forces of law and order in the attempt to avoid arrest. The June 1976 terrorist attacks in Genoa are a watershed as regards overcoming a further threshold in the unstoppable brutalizing process of the shift to more typical forms of terrorist violence. Far from being proof of the concrete force of the clandestine organization, the triple assassination constituted a criminal 'bet' as to the organizational ability of the BR to concentrate the forces of all regular militants who had avoided arrest (around ten) in the execution of an undertaking so sensational as to 'relaunch' the BR, making it appear still firmly in place and growing, regardless of the imprisonment of its 'historic leaders' (who were

simultaneously on trial at the Turin Assize Court). Unfortunately, the BR plan was successful, thanks also to the conspicuous self-financing obtained by the kidnapping of the industrialist Costa. The already-noted restructuring of the repressive apparatus of the state (with respect to the patterns of intervention adopted after the Sossi kidnapping) constituted objective causes of delay in the struggle against the newly-emerging BR.

3.2.3 Lines of interpretation: terrorism in the economic crisis

In order to analyse the development of the BR in this period we need to look at variables that are external to the organization and variables that are internal to it.

As regards the first type of variable, it is possible that the crisis of the protest movements that emerged in the preceding period reflected on the affairs of the BR. The protest slackened off in the universities; the fragile organizations that made up the panorama of the extraparlimentary left disappeared after a few attempts at short-lived alliances; the electoral deadline was met without success; the 'petrol crisis' of 1973 and the politics of austerity that followed constituted difficult new problems for the trade unions – inflation, the *cassa integrazione* and the decentralization of production. The low level of mobilization produced an 'excess of militancy':⁴⁷ that is, it freed an area of ex-militants, who had lost faith in legal forms of collective behaviour and who consequently constituted a possible source of recruits for clandestine organizations.

Another element that could have contributed to broadening the area of those who had lost faith in traditional politics, potential context of reference of the subversive organizations, was singled out by some in the line of the 'historic compromise' adopted by the PCI. According to this hypothesis, terrorist violence would emerge as a reaction to the social pact as a sort of 'symbolic surrogate to [the] class struggle'.⁴⁸ Once again in relation to the problems posed by the 'historic compromise', others have reflected on the peculiar activation of the BR every time the power relations in Italy tend to change in any way that differs from the traditional one.⁴⁹ Given this hypothesis, the suggestion has been made to examine terrorism as the product of external – foreign – forces: a question that is still open but beyond the scope of this essay.⁵⁰

Even considering the enormous importance of contextual variables, we believe that the evolutionary process of the BR in this phase cannot be fully understood without a reconstruction of the internal dynamics of the clandestine organization. The path followed by the BR – and in an even more rapid way by the NAP (Armed Proletarian Nuclei)⁵¹ whose existence did not last for more than a couple of years – is similar to that of other armed groups in the industrial democracies. Because of the very logic of clandestine action, the terrorist organization gradually lost all contact, both material and ideological, with reality. Because of the need to withdraw from state repression, the BR became separated from the

places of collective action. For example, many militants recruited in factories were forced to leave their jobs for fear of being arrested. This consequently lowered the ability and ambition of the underground organization to carry out 'political agitation' and to influence the choices of the mass movement. To compensate for the organizational weakness, the BR accentuated their utilization of terrorist violence, with the result that they were stigmatized by the very social strata from which they expected support. Gradually as the survival of the organization increasingly tended to depend on the outcome of direct clashes with the forces of law and order, the fate of the groups seemed to be sealed. We shall consider this point in more detail in the last part of the chapter. For the time being it is enough to point out that by this time there were already signs of this sort of development, despite the relaunching of the organization apparently caused by the Genoa attacks in 1976.

3.3 The strategy of destruction (1977–8)

The fresh outbursts of violence in 1977 and 1978 essentially set Italian terrorism apart from – initially analogous – phenomena present in other industrial democracies in the same decade.⁵² The violent generation of some collective phenomena emerging between the end of 1976 and the beginning of 1977 supply a new base potential to the clandestine organizations that seemed – at the end of the preceding period – in a phase of decline. The emergence of a new area of recruitment produced broad changes both in the organizational structure and in the extent and type of terrorist action.

3.3.1 The organization: the Partito Comunista Combattente

At the beginning of this period the objective of BR activists was the organization of the broad but dishomogeneous and dislocated area of those who were willing to carry out armed action. With this end in mind, the plan to create the *Partito Comunista Combattente* (PCC) was launched. In April 1977, the BR wrote that a vanguard had developed within the proletarian strata, and that this vanguard had 'adopted the armed struggle for communism as its focus of action [and] thus has formed a true – albeit dispersed – movement of struggle, [which] due to its intensity and political maturity has made the preliminary steps toward civil war and the people's war'.⁵³ In June of the same year the organization stressed the need for the struggle to take a more revolutionary direction:

Together with this richness and complexity there is still a marked dispersion of forces, caused by the particularistic placing of many armed vanguards

which basically fight within the narrow limits of the specific situations of which they are an expression.⁵⁴

It is this function of guide party that the BR would like to achieve; and the document goes on to state that:

to transform the oblique process of a diffused and disorganized civil war, into a general direct offensive of a unitary plan, it is necessary to develop and unify the *Movimento Proletario di Resistenza Offensiva* constructing a fighting party.⁵⁵

While the emergent terrorist organizations attempted – in contrast to the NAP – to give themselves an alternative structure to that experimented by the armed groups in the past, for the realization of the plan outlined above, the *brigatisti* substantially repropounded the same organizational model already expressed in the document found in the Piacenza hideout four years before.⁵⁶ There were nevertheless some changes; the principles appear to be the following:

- 1) There was a clarification of the distinction between regular and irregular members: this was no longer exclusively linked to the clandestine condition of individuals and the division between the two types of militants increasingly reflected the difference between those who dedicated themselves totally to the organization and those who only carried out occasional tasks; there was also the introduction of a new figure, the 'legal regular': that is, a militant who continued to live using his own personal particulars (name, date of birth, etc.), but who 'worked' full-time in the organization.
- 2) The territorial articulation acquired more precise referents, now being able to count on five *colonne*: beyond those 'traditional' ones in Milan, Turin and the Veneto, the by now autonomous Genoa *colonna* and the new *colonna* set up in Rome.
- 3) The BR sought to react to the striking discrepancy between theory and praxis that had in the past prevented the *fronti* from functioning coherently with a decentralized vision of the organization. But the solution was a mere mechanical repositioning of previous models: the only variation was that the *fronti* were reduced to two (logistic and mass, the latter also referred to as the *Fronte della controrivoluzione*). The growing number of militants in prison and their tendency to organize themselves in the so-called *brigade di campo* pushed the BR to build up a 'prison front'.⁵⁷

Once again, however, the oligarchic and centralized formulation predominated in the end: in fact the power was concentrated above all in the Executive Committee, while the fronts were reduced to a sort of 'under-executive', without really being able to run the organization along horizontal lines. It is clearly not sufficient to write that 'the *fronti* are the vehicles of the political policy of the organization, that link up with the poles of intervention (*colonne*), where these [the latter] adopt a class role which is intermediated with the general line and articulated

with the reality of the movement'.⁵⁸ In reality, the BR increasingly resembled an absolute monarchy, where the executive controlled, coordinated and directed everything.

Even if in this phase the BR were unable to accomplish the objective of centralizing and coordinating different instances of the *Movimento Proletario di Resistenza Offensiva* (MPRO) toward the constitution of the PCC, in the middle period the *brigatisti* nevertheless gathered the fruits of their improved organizational structures, surviving longer than other scattered terrorist groups.⁵⁹ In this period, however, the frequency and territorial diffusion of actions for which the BR claimed responsibility already testify to a marked reinforcement of the terrorist organization. While in the two preceding phases terrorist activity had been sporadic – being concentrated in the winter months and with long silences between one action and another – from the beginning of 1977 it resumed with continuity and virulence, with only very brief pauses between the end of July and the beginning of September. Sporadic interventions were replaced by 'campaigns': actions carried out simultaneously by different *colonne* against the same type of target.

At this point it would be interesting to find out where the *brigatisti* managed to recruit members in this period and how they were able to reconstruct an organization that appeared to be compromised. A commonplace that often emerges in the analyses on the 'second wave' of terrorism is the difference between the 'historical' *brigatisti* and those of the new generation. The assertion does not seem refutable. Since, as various witnesses confirm, between 1975 and 1976 police and *carabinieri* succeeded in inflicting severe blows on the organization of the BR, and less than ten regular *brigatisti* were still at large at the end of 1976, we can assert that the membership of the main terrorist organization of the left underwent a radical transformation immediately afterwards. Almost all the terrorists of the 'first generation' were in prison.⁶⁰ Even if, at the beginning of the period, the *brigatisti* of the oldest militancy maintained the key posts in the organization, they shared the leadership with subsequently recruited militants.⁶¹ Moreover, the composition of the 'base' militants was greatly renewed and some of their characteristics were changing. It is above all obvious that the *brigatisti* that joined the organization during this period are nearly always younger: while in the previous period the main defendants in the BR trials were born in the period 1945–50, the new recruits were born between 1950 and 1955.

Only more specific research on the political courses taken by militant members of the armed struggle can tell us what weight the already mentioned crises of some New Left groups (above all, *Potere Operaio* and *Lotta Continua*) had in the recruitment of the terrorist organizations. To cite just a few examples, Walter Alasia, who died in a gun battle with the police at the end of 1976 as well as many of the militants of the NAP and *Prima Linea* (PL), not to mention those left over from the autonomous factory collectives and the degeneration of the most violent groups of the 1977 university movement, had belonged to *Lotta Continua*.

3.3.2 Action: the 'dislocation of the system'

Under the impact of external events, and partially as a consequence of some internal developments, the BR transformed (at times accentuating a process already in action) their strategy (from 'armed propaganda' to 'unleashing civil war'); their targets (the factory to the 'heart of the state'); their definition of the enemy (from *neo-gollismo* to social democracy); their tactics (from 'hit-and-run' to 'dislocation of the apparatus'); and their forms of intervention (from 'punitive actions' to 'destruction').⁶²

The assassination of the General Public Prosecutor, Coco – though this took place in the previous phase – represented a tragic 'bridge' in the transition from actions of armed propaganda to actions intended to 'dislocate' the state structures. The objective was no longer the mere 'exposure' of the hidden manoeuvrings of power or the 'punishment' of enemies of the collective movement; the terrorist organization set itself the task of attacking and destroying capitalist power itself. The image of the enemy also changed. At the beginning of their history the BR had sought to take on the role of vanguard of the movement, also comprising the institutional components of the left. Starting in the mid-1970s, trade-union leaders and *Berlingueriani* (followers of the general secretary of the PCI, Enrico Berlinguer) were considered as the enemies to be beaten. The bourgeois state, we read in the resolution of the Strategic Direction in 1978, alternatively utilizes fascism or social democracy. Where in the past the state had made attempts at authoritarian actions, the present plan was instead a neo-corporatist pact that assigned the task of controlling the working class to the trade unions: in this situation, the armed struggle was the only possible instrument of insurrection against the system. The painstaking ideological work carried out by the BR was partly mirrored by some transformations in the political order. Above all, the ideological shifts served to rationalize the isolation with respect to the social strata to which the organization referred.

The transition from armed propaganda to the logic of 'destruction' implied a transformation in the forms of action. In actions targeting the factory the contrast with respect to the initial activity is clear: in the beginning the choice of each victim was meticulously 'justified' with the listing of the personal 'crimes' of which – according to the BR – he was guilty, but in this period the BR instead attacked at random among the thousands of executives and intermediate cadres of the largest firms. During this two-year period (1977–8) the BR thus carried out eighteen woundings and one assassination among the personnel at Fiat and Lancia in Turin, Sit Siemens, Alfa Romeo, Breda and Pirelli in Milan, Italsider and Ansaldo in Genoa. Two industrialists were moreover injured by the *brigatisti*. In none of these actions were the BR concerned to stress – even if only for the sake of propaganda – the 'responsibility' of the victims.

Individuals came under attack merely because, in carrying out a task in a complex mechanism, they were symbols of the system that the BR wanted to destroy.⁶³ By striking indiscriminately the members of certain social groups, the terrorists aimed to promote a generalized sense of terror in order to block at various points the functioning of some 'command systems'.

With the 'cooling-off' of the factory conflicts, the terrorist organization cut itself off from the objectives of the trade-union struggle and its actions tended to be more frequently directed against political objectives. To this end, the BR pursued a pattern of action that differed from the one carried out by the scattered terrorist groups. Where the latter attacked the symbols of a diffused power that penetrated the private spheres of the individual's life – striking gynaecologists, psychiatrists and drug dealers, for example – the BR focused on the DC, singled out as the 'national expression' of the agreement between the capitalist regimes towards the constitution of the 'imperialist state of multinationals'. In this period the actions against the largest government party followed two separate logics. On one hand, a good twelve municipal and regional DC councillors were injured, which demonstrates the will of the BR to persevere in their programme of dislocating the state apparatus by means of a detailed action of intimidation of political personnel at the intermediate level.⁶⁴ This first tactic was exemplified in the well-known slogan of the day 'strike one to educate a hundred'. On the other hand, actions were directed, with a greater logic of 'direct confrontation', at the physical elimination of those political opponents considered to pose the greatest threat to the terrorist plan. This was the logic of the most serious and emblematic crime of the entire period: the abduction of the president of the DC, Aldo Moro, that cost the life of five of his bodyguards and – after a long and dramatic kidnapping – his own death.⁶⁵ Heedless of their isolation – or perhaps in an extreme attempt to react to it – the BR attempted to engage in a confrontation with the state based on the military logic of the maximization of the real losses of the enemy. The abduction by the BR had had a double objective: to mobilize the various armed groups working in Italy, pushing them to intensify their actions and to 'raise the level of attack', and to provoke a climate of civil war that would facilitate some form of legitimization of the underground organization by the state institutions. Given the enormous disproportion between the forces employed, this ambitious plan failed and the outcome of Aldo Moro's kidnapping was – quite the opposite – an explosive factor of crisis. Not only did the BR fail to obtain any type of recognition from the institutions, but the decision to kill the hostage also produced strong controversy both among the militants of other clandestine groups and within the organization itself.

With their ambitions to find new recruits, the BR, we shall see more clearly in the following period, turned their attention to new groups that had taken the strategy of violent action on board, especially the groups

of the so-called *terrorismo diffuso* (see Note 59). In the documents of this period, the BR talked about subjects – partially outside the factory – who had already chosen the road to civil war.⁶⁶ To lend theoretical dignity to the redefinition of their potential base, the resolution of the Strategic Direction of 1978 contained a long section dedicated to the analysis of the class structure in the society of mature capitalism. According to what the *brigatisti* wrote, in the large industry only the unskilled worker would have revolutionary interests, while the professional workers would have reformist ambitions. The best allies of the mass worker would thus be found outside the factory: among the manual-service workers, the 'industrial reserve army' and the marginal proletariat. According to the BR, from these groups would emerge those armed but dispersed struggles that the *Partito Comunista Combattente* hoped to unify. Various actions were aimed at influencing these social groups and at 'hegemonizing' the clandestine groups born after the 1977 movement. The most emblematic of them was probably the wounding of the Dean of the Faculty of Economy and Commerce at the University of Rome, which took place during the worst phase of disorder at the university. In addition, the campaign against journalists carried out at the beginning of June 1977, which led to the tragic and fatal attack on the vice-director of *La Stampa*, Carlo Casalegno, probably aimed at building up 'prestige' to impress the members of the small clandestine groups.⁶⁷

Finally, there was an increase in the number of actions that expressed the war declared against the repressive apparatus of the state. The BR were responsible for a number of assassinations against the police and the judiciary, which during this period paid the tragic price of fifteen human lives. In this respect we should also mention the appalling series of crimes carried out by the BR to prevent the carrying out of the Turin trial against the so-called historical heads – or 'founding fathers' – of the organization. The assassination of the General Public Prosecutor Coco in June 1976 had prevented the continuation of the trial. In April 1977, the assassination of the Turin lawyer, Fulvio Croce, prevented the formation of a jury and the trial was postponed for a second time. In March 1978, the Assize Court of Turin was reconvened for a third time. The new trial session was accompanied, outside the court, by attacks programmed with inexorable cynicism: the homicide of Marshal Berardi, precisely at the beginning of the trial; the tragic events connected with the kidnapping of Moro; and the killing of Commissario Esposito, which was 'placed' in such a way as to coincide with the time of the court's final decision. This time, however, the trial took place and the BR suffered a heavy political defeat. The terrorist group claimed that the Turin trial was not 'a' trial but *the* trial of the armed struggle: and that the armed struggle could not – in reality – be tried. The BR then set themselves two objectives: to intimidate those (judges, juries and court-defence lawyers) responsible for carrying out the trial; and to demonstrate that the state would only be able to finish the trial if it rejected the application of democratic rules,

thus revealing the 'true' authoritarian nature of a state based on the arbitrary repression of 'dissent'. The painstaking respect for democratic legality, instead, made a considerable contribution to instilling elements of crisis into the terrorist groups.

The attempt at 'dislocation' was moreover directed against the Ministry of Justice and the prisons. Forced by the creation of the maximum-security prisons to put aside any plan to free their imprisoned comrades, the *brigatisti* fell back on an alarming series of kidnappings and serious crimes against members of the judiciary and prison officers.⁶⁸ This ended with an attack that was an emblematic example of the BR's new 'logic': the killing, in an attack under the walls of *Carceri Nuove* in Turin, of two policemen on external-security duty.

The attempt to influence the area of the armed struggle with such actions and the increasing physical confrontation with the repressive apparatus of the state converged in bringing about more and more violent forms of action. This transformation in the forms of action was ideologically justified as a transition from 'armed peace' to 'unfurling civil war':

Dislocating the forces of the enemy means an attack whose main objective is still that of the propaganda of the armed struggle and its need, but in it already begins to work also the tactical principle of the next phase: the destruction of enemy forces ... Dislocating the enemy forces is therefore [the logic of action in] the last period of the phase of armed propaganda [which will] progressively usher in that of the revolutionary civil war.⁶⁹

In a tragically coherent way this new phase heralded – with respect to previous years – the increasing violence of the tactics employed. Various reasons could explain this progressive barbarization. In the first place, the woundings and the assassinations probably aimed at demonstrating technical efficiency in order to hegemonize an area already inclined toward the armed struggle. Secondly, the assassinations allowed the BR to keep public attention focused on terrorist activity. Thirdly – and particularly in the subsequent phase – the increasing brutality derived from the 'anger' generated by the incipient political crisis within the organization and from the belief that such a crisis could be hidden by repeatedly raising the 'military' level of confrontation. We should finally remember that the plan for greater military 'efficiency' in the actions has been explicitly theorized in the documents of the organization. In an attempt ideologically to rationalize the escalation of terror, the BR wrote that:

At the beginning and because we were forced to do so, we operated in small nuclei and carried out small actions. Then, as the guerrilla warfare became stronger and better established, we went on to more complex actions that simultaneously employed – but always in small actions – more nuclei. [The stage] beyond guerrilla warfare [directed] the use of campaigns, that is, [the

organization of actions] simultaneously in more poles on the same line of battle. This is a guiding principle for the growth of guerrilla warfare. A second guiding principle was that of the transition from quick actions ('*mordi e fuggi*') to 'prolonged actions' (Amerio, Sossi, Costa). That allowed us to carry out more incisive armed propaganda and to demonstrate to the movement of resistance the levels reached by guerrilla warfare in the organization of proletarian power. It moreover allowed us to multiply the contradictions within the state. A third guiding principle, finally, was that of the rapid concentration of numerous forces to attack the enemy in small battles (Casale, Coco). The restructuring of the Imperialist State of the Multinationals is characterized by its militarization and by the concentration of military forces in defence of its vital organs. Developing the revolutionary initiative to [bring about] the political and military dislocation of this apparatus involves the adoption of new combat techniques that foresee and make present from now on, the fundamental aspect of the civil war: the destruction of the imperialist forces.⁷⁰

3.3.3 Lines of interpretation: political violence and the 1977 movement

The reorganization of the BR after the serious crisis of the preceding period was undoubtedly connected to the emergence of new collective, and quite soon, violent unrest. Hence the debate on the history of Italy's main terrorist group partly coincides with that of the origins of the 1977 protest and the reasons for its degeneration.

According to one interpretation, the deviation of the protest movement at the beginning of the period toward violent forms of action was not so much linked to the 'intrinsic nature' of the protest but rather to its destructive dynamics. The factor that sparked off protest was the proposal for university reform, which the students defined as the reactionary attempt to destroy a series of victories won from 1968 onwards. In the movement, however, we find flowing together – from the first phase of its existence – a series of political initiatives that took place outside the school and the factory: the circles of the young proletariat, the *consultori* (advisory health centres for women) born out of the feminist movement, the patrols against drug dealers, the committees for the 'self-reduction' of electricity bills or cinema tickets and the first 'free radio stations'. The ideology of the new protest was more open to the issues of the post-industrial society – the extension of the dominion of the (state) apparatus over the most private spheres of individual life and the reappropriation of the repressed needs of physical and personal subjectivity – and critical of the so-called *economicismo* (strictly economic interpretation of Marxism) of the New Left. The new political groups refused the organizational model of the Marxist-Leninist group, and mistrusted some of the more traditional forms of protest.

Two solutions were adopted in the search for more effective instruments of intervention. One part of the movement – which took the

form of the 'metropolitan indians' at the height of the protest,⁷¹ but whose precursors must be looked for in the women's movement – stressed spontaneity and imagination. Another component of the movement was influenced by the escalation of violence that began with the street clashes with police and fascists (from car-jack attacks to molotov cocktails and from molotovs to the use of high firepower pistols, like P-38). The presence of terrorist groups also helped this escalation by providing the justifications for the use of violence. Some episodes of repression in the spring of 1977 probably had an impact on the radicalization of the protest.⁷² With the movement's inability to find intermediate objectives on which to develop the protest, and in isolation from other political and social forces, it was the most violent wings of the collectives of *Autonomia* that came to dominate the other components. After a few months of life the movement was already irremediably split: meetings became impossible when the more violent elements began to deal with internal clashes by physical violence and all attempts to propagandize the reasons for the protest externally were abandoned. By 1978 the movement was in full crisis: if one component gave up political involvement and returned to private life or more cultural forms of action, other fringes took the road of no return into clandestinity. As already stated, it was to these groups, which were already well-disposed towards the illegal practice of political intervention, that the BR turned their attention for recruits. The new *brigitista* thesis of the transition from armed propaganda to civil war came from the growth of what the BR defined as the *movimento di resistenza proletario offensivo*.⁷³ that is:

the area of antagonistic class behaviour caused by the worsening of the economic and political crisis ... the area of the forces, groups and revolutionary nuclei that give a political-military content to their initiatives of anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist, anti-revisionist and pro-communist struggle.⁷⁴

The rapid degeneration of the collective movement of 1977 was also analysed in reference to the conditions of the political system; we have already mentioned the thesis of a 'blocked' political system and the absence of an institutional opposition. The Italian political class was accused of being 'unable to carry out its tasks if not in a repetitive way, [or] to renew itself conforming to new needs or new stimuli, to develop and to regulate itself'.⁷⁵ Moreover, the PCI (engaged in the politics of 'institutional inclusion'), the trade unions (forced to cope with the difficulties of managing an economic crisis), and the political formations of the New Left were all politically unable to organize the new social groups and to represent their interests.

This interpretation, however, needs to be more carefully examined. In this case, the protest takes on violent characteristics because of the very characteristics of its social base. The 1977 movement was often described

as a movement of the *Lumpenproletariat* – that is, of those who were socially alienated or in insecure employment. Sometimes the most specifically economic aspects of these definitions are uppermost; at other times there is an emphasis on the appearance of new value systems. An initial analysis of the characteristics of the *brigatisti* arrested after 1977 does not confirm the hypothesis of an ‘entrenching’ of terrorism among socially alienated groups.⁷⁶ While the percentage of unemployed among the arrested is irrelevant, from the data available it turns out that, before the final transition to clandestinity, many *brigatisti* were part of the central work-market (employed in large factories or the public sector), with manual workers, but also intellectuals (teachers, technicians, etc.) and professionals. As far as the participation of students is concerned (this group constituted a considerable if not the main component of the membership of the organization) and the appearance of new collective protagonists (carriers of alternative value systems with respect to both those proposed by bourgeois culture and those widespread in working-class culture), we limit ourselves to observing that the phenomena of intellectual unemployment and the rejection of industrial society are not peculiar to the Italian situation. The theories that attempt to explain terrorism as the mechanical effect of social marginality are hence unable to offer any explanation of the specific consequences this phenomenon has produced in Italy.

3.4 The ‘military’ confrontation with the state for the survival of the organization (1979–82)

This period began with the murder of the trade unionist Guido Rossa in January 1979; it witnesses the second and more marked political and, subsequently, organizational collapse of the BR. While the political plan to involve the working class in the armed conflict clearly failed, state repression began to inflict incisive defeats on the clandestine organization. The terrorist groups found themselves even more isolated by the crisis of the youth protest and increasingly concentrated their resources on the military defence of their members and the survival of the organization. If in 1979 the BR – regardless of their political defeats – managed to maintain a certain organizational force, from 1980 the drop in their offensive capacity was vertical. The isolation and the defeats accentuated the internal divisions and multiplied the number of defections. In spite of some successful actions from the military point of view and the consistent recruitment among the survivors of scattered terrorist groups, the BR were unable to halt their own crisis.

3.4.1 The organization: internal factions and inter-group war

Up until the preceding period, the organization had more or less remained

intact (and had made great efforts to appear so), but in the period beginning in 1979 we see a series of internal splits and divisions, with long-lasting reciprocal antagonisms that sometimes ended in death threats and in the rather pathetic invitation to adopt a sort of federalism of armed groups that was not followed up. While it formally maintained the compartmentalized and centralized structure that had characterized it in the past, the old organization of the BR broke down under the blows of exacerbated internal divisions. With the rapid decline of the 1977 movement and the equally rapid decline of the scattered terrorist groups, the hopes of a generalized guerrilla war vanished. At the same time, the BR found themselves confronted with a certain number of militants but without any political reference point for action. The solution adopted was to define the armed struggle as autonomous with respect to other forms of ‘class struggle’, up to the point where it was considered the only possible form of the defence of the proletarian masses. The roots of the marked internal divisions during this period are certainly to be found in the situation of open political crises the BR had already begun to experience in the period immediately preceding the murder of Aldo Moro. The conflicts that shattered the group – apart from personal struggles for leadership⁷⁷ – were symptoms of dissatisfaction with the manifest isolation of the organization. A common element among the splinter groups was – probably not incidentally – the reciprocal accusation of *militarismo*, understood as a separation-off from the political logic of intervention i.e. the extremist tendency to use exclusively military arguments to justify the armed struggle.

The first split within the organization appeared in 1979. In a document published in July by the New Left daily, *Lotta Continua*, a group of dissenters – the most well-known being Adriana Faranda and Valerio Morucci, both ex-members of *Potere Operaio* – accused the historical leaders (nearly all imprisoned in Asinara) of having broken off all contact with the reference base. These dissenters, defined by the press as *movimentisti* (favouring collective movements irrespective of its political contents), levelled the criticism of *vetero-stalinismo* (outdated-Stalinism) and *vetero-operaismo* (outdated emphasis on the ‘worker tradition’) against the orthodox BR, the first because of its conception of the party as an external vanguard and the second because of its mechanical deduction of the central importance of the worker from the notion of productive work. The group headed by Faranda and Morucci deplored the fact that the *fronte di massa* did not function properly; they stressed the need for involvement in the ‘new sectors of political intervention which are developing beyond the big factories and the hegemonic figure of the “mass worker”’, sectors in which Communism ‘already exists as an affirmation of the ‘socialized individual’ against all forms of delegation, [and which is] rich in critical ability and the willingness to enjoy the riches provided by the development of productive forces’.⁷⁸ According to this splinter group, the armed struggle needed to follow the rhythms

of growth and development of the new social subject, while the assassination of Moro had represented instead the breaking-off of the focus on the work among the masses.

The response of the orthodox BR to the criticisms of 'young master Morucci and Miss Faranda' was severe. In a document dated July 1979 the *brigatisti* in prison in Asinara hotly restated criticisms of the groups belonging to *Autonomia*, reaffirmed the centrality of the factory worker against the thesis of the 'socialized worker' and stressed the need for the party to unite against 'armed spontaneity'. Despite this, only a few months later, it was precisely the main exponents of the first-generation *brigatisti* who began to argue with the external group led by Mario Moretti. In the autumn of 1979, the imprisoned first-generation members of the BR demanded the dismissal of the standing Executive Committee. It was accused of bureaucratic and military deviation, of being unable to mediate with the masses (particularly at Fiat), of the bad management of the Moro kidnapping and of excluding imprisoned militants from participating in the internal debate on the future of the organization. After the initial clash the fracture was diplomatically patched up, but the *brigatisti* of the historic nucleus nevertheless became willing to support the setting up of other breakaway groups within the organization.

The group headed by Curcio and Franceschini in some way favoured the setting up of the *colonna* Walter Alasia in Milan as an autonomous clandestine group in contrast to the official BR. In the meeting of the Strategic Direction of 1980, a nucleus of the Walter Alasia *colonna* called for the resignation of 'Moretti and company' – as the first-generation *brigatisti* had done beforehand – accusing the leaders of being responsible for the loss of contacts with the workplace and with the working class. The appearance of the first symptoms of insubordination constituted a serious risk for a military-type organization such as the BR. The leaders of the organization certainly realized this and after the expulsion of the rebel *colonna* an entire document was dedicated to the episode, significantly entitled 'Beat liquidationist opportunism and defeatist ideology'. While the Executive Committee criticized the Walter Alasia group for its 'theoretical incompetence' and 'negative attitude', it interpreted the split within the organization as the consequence of the difficulties of managing the transition from the armed propaganda to civil war. The orthodox BR defined the split as:

the infantile reaction of [those] who, faced with the tactical difficulties of the revolution, stop reasoning. In this way the political struggle is reduced to the confrontation of banally personalized power.⁷⁹

Finally, the historic nucleus also supported the last and most serious splinter group, founded in the spring-summer of 1981: that of the *Fronte carceri* of Senzani, which generated the *Partito della Guerriglia del*

Proletariato Metropolitano (Guerrilla Party of the Metropolitan Working Class). Here again, the main accusation made by the group against the leadership concerned the loss of any sort of contact with the protest movement. This line of argument, which helps to explain the conflict of power at the top leadership level, probably mirrored – as in other cases – a widespread unease over the unstoppable loss of any hope of influencing a broader protest movement. Its ambition to find a new base of reference pushed the *Partito-Guerriglia* into turning its attention to the marginal proletariat of the great southern metropoli. In concrete terms – as for the Walter Alasia group – this ambition only produced an accentuation of the savageness of the actions carried out. A document formulated by ex-terrorists states that:

this struggle between factions within the BR highlights how the populist tendency of the OCC (*Organizzazioni Comuniste Combattenti*) to try to obtain the solidarity of the masses, gaining their solidarity with actions supporting the class struggle, and the militaristic tendency to attack the political and military structures of power, in a sort of private war, are nothing other than two sides of the same coin; they are used at different times by the same organization or faction, or the various organizations or factions are counterposed on the two choices in a game of constantly inverting roles.⁸⁰

Factionism, however, was not the only result of the political crisis of the organization. Many *brigatisti*, mistrusting what remained of the collapse of the initial plan that had motivated their choice of the armed struggle and encouraged by the concessions that a law approved *ad hoc* afforded those collaborating with justice or who publicly renounced their past as terrorists, broke their pact of association with the terrorist organization. The confessions of the *pentiti* brought about the arrest of terrorists and supporters and the discovery of a series of hideouts.

From 1980 (the year of the arrest and subsequent confession of the first 'big repentant', Patrizio Peci) the erosion of the BR structure – whatever the name assumed by the various splinter groups – became constant and unstoppable all over Italy. Despite the occasional – and sometimes savage – renewal of the criminal offensive,⁸¹ between the end of 1981 and the beginning of 1982 the failure of the campaign to kidnap Fiat manager, Cesare Romiti, and the freeing of the Nato general, James Lee Dozier, confirmed a further collapse of the *Partito-Guerriglia* and of the rival BR faction in the shape of the *Partito Comunista Combattente* (PCC).

Moreover, the collapse of the web of solidarity within the organization had a deleterious effect on the network of external supporters who had in the past supplied the important logistic support. The image of the BR deteriorated and the area of the so-called 'non-rejection' towards terrorism, where the *brigatisti* had found hiding places and cover, tended to dissolve.

The separateness of the class movements that reduces the recruitment and the support bases of the OCC in the ghetto-milieu well-known in counter-guerrilla work is translated in a chronic logistic weakness, seen then that the clandestine apparatus of the OCC are getting progressively heavier.⁸²

The multiplication of the organizational 'events' and the proliferation of splinter groups appear to be an attempt to fill the vacuum left by the wave of arrests that took place at the end of 1982.⁸³ Moreover, a significant percentage of the 'last recruits' of *brigatismo* was made up of ex-prisoners, relations of imprisoned terrorists, old contacts or old militants who had been recycled even after a considerable length of time after 'freezing' or disaffection.

3.4.2 Action: a 'private' war for survival

This period witnessed the exponential concentration of the BR's resources on the struggle for the survival of the organization.⁸⁴ Most of the actions were aimed at acquiring material guarantees (e.g. self-financing by means of bank robberies) and reconstructing the psychological pact of solidarity among the members of the various fringes into which the clandestine formation was divided; the latter also included the violent intimidation of and retaliation against those who took an openly hostile position to terrorism. Thus, the murder of the Genoan worker Guido Rossa – who testified to the judiciary against a *brigatista* – was followed by a ruthless punitive campaign against the repented (*pentiti*) comrades and those suspected of *pentimento*.⁸⁵ Among the most tragic episodes of this campaign was the kidnapping and assassination of Roberto Peci, the brother of the *pentito*, Patrizio, carried out by the Senzani group in the summer of 1981. Equally savage were the murders of the two Mondiapol policemen carried out in Turin in October 1982, with the aim to propagandize the presumed betrayal (subsequently recognized to have been non-existent) of the BR leader, Natalia Ligas. Peculiar to this phase were the actions carried out against the army. These were intended simultaneously to demonstrate the level of 'class war' reached in the conflict and to obtain arms. The most serious action of the series was the attack at Salerno on an army truck, which caused the death of three policemen and left many injured.

The inevitable consequence of the deterioration of the private confrontation between the clandestine organization and the state was then the growth of the frequency of direct confrontations between terrorists and the forces of law and order. The number of members of the *polizia* or *carabinieri* who lost their lives or were seriously injured in *brigatisti* attacks or in gun battles that often preceded the arrests or followed criminal actions was high. BR commando groups also attacked – consistently with the logic of open war in which the objective is to inflict heavy losses on the enemy – the highest levels of the

law-enforcement hierarchy: during this period we witness the assassinations of the *tenente colonnello* of the *carabinieri*, Varisco, the Commissario police chief of Venice, Albanese, and the head of the 'Flying Squad' of Naples, Ammaturo. At the beginning of 1982 the deputy head of the Rome section of the anti-terrorist police group (Digos), De Simone, was wounded.

There were also many attacks against the judiciary. In the period February–March 1980 these included the assassinations of the vice-president of the Higher Judicial Council (*Consiglio Superiore della Magistratura*, CSM), Vittorio Bachelet, and the ex-head of the Secretary for Prisons, Girolamo Minervini.⁸⁶ Once again, the prison sector was singled out as the target. The campaign against the high-security prisons included two revolts of political prisoners in Trani and Asinara; in December 1980 the kidnapping of a senior magistrate working for the Ministry of Justice, Giovanni D'Urso; and the murder of General Galvaligi who was one of those responsible for security in the special prisons.

Notwithstanding this concentration of organizational resources on survival, actions apparently aimed at political propaganda continued to take place, at least in the first two years of the period (1979–80). The splinter groups 'specialized' in different types of targets: the Walter Alasia group focused on various Milan factories; the 'historic nucleus' concentrated on objectives connected with the prisons; the Senzani group tried to gain support from the movement of the unemployed in Naples and the *veneti* sought international support with the abduction and kidnapping of the NATO General Dozier, who was freed after a few days by the special police squads.

Even after having proved to be ineffective, the actions of 'disarticulation of the intermediate cadres' persisted, both in the factories and against the DC. The victims within the factories were chosen at a higher level of the hierarchy with respect to the past, but were less numerous. In 1979 (which was, as we have said, a 'bridging' year) and at the beginning of 1980 the 'orthodox' BR still appeared to focus some attention on the factory – as testified by the bloody actions at Fiat in Turin and at Meccanica Generale Navale in Genoa. After the destruction of the Turin and Genoan *colonne* the factory target was more or less monopolized by the Walter Alasia group and by the *colonna* of the Veneto.⁸⁷

Actions carried out against the political forces – concentrated against the DC, the only exception being a Communist assessor wounded in Naples – were also quite numerous at the beginning of the period but tended to drop as the pressure of the state apparatus against terrorist groups increased. In the period 1979–80, the DC continued to be the target of numerous actions,⁸⁸ but in the successive two-year period there were only two criminal episodes carried out against the party of the relative majority: both took place in Naples and both were particularly serious.⁸⁹

A weak attempt was made, moreover, at propaganda directed at the 'new emerging subjects'. The rebel *brigatisti* of the Walter Alasia group turned their attention to the service proletariat with some actions at the Milan Policlinico: the most serious of these was the murder of the health director of the Marangoni hospital. In the spring of 1980, the Rome *colonna* concentrated various interventions against presumed 'exploitation' of workers with insecure employment or working in the 'black' economy: for example, the woundings of an official from the Ministry of Employment, of three members of a cooperative of porters and of the owner of the Sales Offices of a publishing house. The abduction of General Dozier was, moreover, interpreted as an attempt to gather solidarity from the newly-born peace movement. Finally, using populist demagoguery, the *brigatisti* of the Neapolitan *colonna* led by Senzani demanded, in exchange for the freeing of the abducted DC politician Cirillo, the requisitioning of housing for those made homeless by the earthquake in Irpinia in 1980 and unemployment benefit for all those registered as unemployed.

These apparently propagandistic actions were prompted, nevertheless, by a strategy that differed from that of previous periods. If the actions against the DC, all of which occurred in pre-electoral periods, respected in a certain sense the rules of 'timeliness', in this period the aim of maintaining some formal link with the mass movement disappeared altogether; the latter in many ways manifested its desire definitively to reject any form of terroristic violence.⁹⁰

It seems to us, however, that the real motivation for many of the terrorist crimes carried out during this period can be traced to the struggle among the various factions fighting over the hegemony of the leftovers of the organization. The kidnapping of D'Urso and the murder of Galvaligi could have been motivated by the choice of the BR's leaders to meet some of the demands made by the 'historic nucleus' in prison.⁹¹ The assassinations of the industrial managers Briano and Mazzanti were (according to some witnesses) organized by the Walter Alasia group to reinforce its prestige in the conflict with the Executive Committee. The simultaneous kidnapping of the two industrialists, Taliercio and Sandrucci (the first carried out by a sort of breakaway section of the BR operating in the Veneto and the second by the Walter Alasia group) seem to be a further expression of the competition between the two branches of the organization.

For all those factions into which the BR was divided, criminal action – ever less rationalizable in terms of the expression of political and social conflict – expressed the desperate search to testify to the survival of the group and, with it, to the group's existential identity. This need also conditioned the choice of the forms of action; the terrorists' ambition was increasingly concentrated on the military success of the action. Increasingly bloody crimes were carried out to maintain faith in the choice of the armed struggle among the members of the group.

Moreover, in order to keep the attention of the media concentrated on their activity during this period, the *brigatisti* carried out six kidnappings – which lasted from one to three months – and which were often accompanied by tragic events. The way of making interventions became so savage as to provoke (see, for example, the case of the two prison-guards murdered in Turin) condemnation from within the terrorist organization itself. While the number of attacks on property, with its limited instrumental use, were reduced, the number of murders for which the BR claimed responsibility remained relatively high; eleven in 1979, eight in 1980, eight in 1981 and fourteen in 1982.

As we have said, the number of deaths was not accompanied by a reinforcing of the organization and the military success of the campaign in the summer of 1981 (four simultaneous kidnappings) did not translate into political success. Threatened from within by the series of dissociations and constantly under attack from outside by the forces of law and order, the remaining groups of *brigatisti*, in order to deny defeat, were forced to construct a new image of the armed struggle as autonomous and self-sufficient. The most recent documents presented – much more emphatically than in the past – a completely unreal image of reality: the language is cryptic and the guiding logic for actions of blind fury is quite incomprehensible to the outsider (and was at times rejected even within the organization). One of the documents written by 'dissociated' terrorists states:

With the *Partito della Guerriglia del Proletariato Metropolitano* and the actions of the last months, the long phase in which the fighting praxis was seen in function of the activation of a revolutionary process on the battlefield or ... in the real interests of the proletariat, has come to an end. Now there is a phase of war among bands as an end unto itself, as a praxis of liberation. The recent theoretical syntheses of the *Partito della Guerriglia*, are the most coherent ideological base. These are not limited, as were the old documents, to analysing the reality in a more or less mystified way, drawing lines of tendency in which to insert their own action: the new theorization does not propose an analysis, but rather a new vision and way of living, a reality beginning from the existential condition of metropolitan guerrilla warfare. One no longer speaks, as before, of civil war as an historical phase of the class struggle to be promoted [by means of] guerrilla warfare, one speaks of 'war' as a dimension until now neglected by reality, the only complete expression of conscience and the political struggle of the proletariat to the present level of the development of capital, [the] expression of a new 'absolute enmity between classes'. Guerrilla warfare is then the only way to break the total social control that is first of all control of the conscience, only expression of conscience and class struggle to which is counterposed the state of somnambulism and madness into which the non-fighting proletariat (the so-called schizophrenic metropolitan proletariat) would fall. It is not necessary to win civil war, but only to witness it taking place in the daily reality. From this war as a hallucinated vision of the social reality, one passes then to the

actions of guerrilla warfare which contain their own justification in the form of a simple activation of a conjectured social potential.⁹²

A final observation refers to the force of terrorism throughout the period. If 1979 and 1980 were still years when virulent terrorist actions in many Italian provinces persisted, from 1981 the pace and frequency of *brigatista* activity slackened off and was mainly concentrated in Rome with some actions taking place in Naples.

3.4.3 Lines of interpretation: the crisis of the clandestine organization

Without doubt, various elements had an impact on the crisis of the BR: the affairs of the scattered terrorist groups, the growing and irreversible isolation of the BR in public opinion, the law on the *pentiti* passed in 1981 and the greater efficiency of the state apparatus in the repression of clandestine groups.⁹³ Nevertheless, the collapse of the terrorist organization also appears to follow internal dynamics, already experienced by clandestine groups in other countries.⁹⁴

During its evolution, the terrorist organization moved away from its action of political propaganda and concentrated instead on its 'private' war with the apparatus of the state. The process of development of the BR evolved towards an *impasse*. Crushed by the contradictions between the need to prepare for a long battle and the need to maintain conditions of clandestinity, the BR were forced to reject the instruments of propaganda guaranteed to collective actors in democratic regimes. The terrorist organization then accentuated its isolation when the logic of the planned actions forced the confrontation with the repressive apparatus of the state. Trapped between state repression on one hand, and progressive reduction of possible initial sympathies on the other, the BR found themselves increasingly entrapped in actions to defend the organization. The need for financing forced the terrorists to take part in acts of petty *banditismo*, which exposed them to armed clashes with the police and dangerous competition with the *malavita* (when it was not actually colluding with organized crime), further discrediting the image of the organization. The contacts with common criminal elements was accentuated in the prisons, where terrorists were sometimes forced to enter into alliances (or pacts of 'non-belligerence') with the rival bands governing relations among prisoners. Forced by the pressure of the forces of law and order, the contacts with the outside were limited to the urgent demand for logistic support.

The BR's direct confrontation with the repressive apparatus of the state took place in two different periods. The different size of the force reached by terrorism in these two cycles of its existence is evident in the different efforts made by the state institutions to defeat the clandestine organizations. In the first phase (1975–6) the organization of the BR –

stable but reduced in size – was damaged in little more than a year by a series of arrests. In contrast, nearly four years were needed (1979–82) to make the terrorist organization – already politically on the decline – collapse under the blows of military defeats. In the second cycle of the defeat of the organization, the BR experienced the collapse of solidarity from within. At a time when terrorism was already in a state of political crisis, the Italian state introduced the already-mentioned law on *pentiti*, which stipulated the reductions of sentences for terrorists who collaborated with the state and special treatment for those who publicly dissociated themselves from the armed struggle. These two factors contributed to breaking the bonds of solidarity within the organization, markedly reduced the possibility of external help, established a climate of reciprocal suspicion among members of the band and led to the long chain of subsequent arrests that enabled the state to accomplish the organizational defeat of the BR.

Notes

- 1 For a definition of the category 'terrorism' and an analysis of the international literature on the subject, see della Porta (1983).
- 2 For the 'culture of terrorism', which is not dealt with in this work, see Dalla Chiesa (1981), Dini and Manconi (1981) and Marletti (1979).
- 3 For a comparison with data on other clandestine organizations, of both the left and right, see della Porta and Rossi (1983).
- 4 The history of the BR has been reconstructed by, among others, Agostini (1980), Barbato (1980), Bello (1981), Bocca (1978a, 1978b), Galleni (1981), Manzini (1979), Pansa (1980), Papa (1979), *Soccorso rosso* (1976), Silj (1977), Sole (1979), Tessandori (1977) and Weinberg (1982). Direct sources have also been used from *Tribunale di Torino* (1975a, 1978, 1979).
- 5 Cited in Silj, (1977) p. 89.
- 6 *Brigate rosse*, (1971a).
- 7 In the period under review BR also attempted to establish a base in Emilia but without success; the militants stationed there were subsequently transferred to the Veneto.
- 8 Information on the recruitment of terrorists in factories can be found in Cavallini (1978).
- 9 Presented in *Soccorso rosso* (1976) p. 125.
- 10 During this phase, many of the things written in the documents of the organization were no more than forecasts or programmes, rather than actual working situations.
- 11 The term 'mass front' is used because the 'factory front' – in contrast to the 'logistic' front – had an external 'referent' outside the organization.
- 12 It has been discovered, for example, that there were double versions of some texts for congresses organized by this *collettivo*: militants received one or other of the two versions depending on their supposed attitude towards the armed struggle.
- 13 *Brigate rosse* (1971a).
- 14 *Ibid.*

- 15 *Brigate rosse* (1973).
- 16 *Brigate rosse* (1971b).
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 *Brigate rosse* (1971a).
- 19 Corporatist-type trade unions set up by factory owners to avoid the formation of left-wing trade unions.
- 20 A document on the structure of neo-fascist groups in Milan is contained in *Brigate rosse* (1971c).
- 21 *Brigate rosse* (1971a).
- 22 The Piazza Fontana bombing took place in a Milan bank on 12 December 1969, causing the death of sixteen people and wounding ninety. In December 1970, *Principe* Valerio Borghese, an ex-official of the fascist Republic of Salò, attempted a right-wing coup with the occupation of part of the *Ministero degli Interni* in Rome. See also the affair of the *Rosa dei Venti*, an organization working 'parallel' to the intelligence body, SID. For both cases, see G. Viglietti (1986) in Borracetti (ed.), *Eversione di destra, terrorismo, stragi*, Milan, Angeli.
- 23 Important, with regard to the Turin *colonna*, was the construction of a logistic hinterland in the small town of Biella. Here many militants were recruited but none of them were ever used in action. In fact, the Biella structures were only used to deposit material or to find refuge outside the operational zones.
- 24 Transferring one of the founders of the organization, Alberto Franceschini, who was arrested shortly afterwards.
- 25 In the Marches and Tuscany the BR only established regional committees. These were structures whose scope was markedly inferior to that of the *colonne*, precisely because of the lack of an *in situ* 'referent' that would allow a more conspicuous presence.
- 26 *Brigate rosse* (1974) p. 25.
- 27 A BR document reproduced in *Soccorso rosso* (1976) p. 277.
- 28 The document continues, 'From a political point of view there is no difference between militants in the regular forces and irregular forces. Both contribute with parity of rights and obligations to ensure the general political line of the organization'. The document found in the hideout at Piacenza is reproduced in full in *Tribunale di Torino* (1975a).
- 29 The first meeting of the Strategic Direction took place at the end of 1974 in the Veneto after the arrest of Curcio and Franceschini on 8 September of that year.
- 30 *Tribunale di Torino* (1975a).
- 31 The Strategic Direction was a type of parliament of the organization, which used the papers written by the various *colonne* and by imprisoned comrades as a basis for discussion. Finally, the Strategic Direction sums up the argument and sets down the political line chosen in a special document that becomes valid in the long-term.
- 32 The proposal to intervene in particular sectors could obviously also start 'from below', on the basis of communications by the *brigata* about current needs.
- 33 With regard to propaganda activity, we should note the BR's experience with the publication *Controinformazione*, which involved – at the compilation and diffusion stages – militants from other groups whose relationship with the BR thus became rather close. In later years, the diffusion of the

- ideological message, in the form of their own publications, took place by means of normal commercial channels: it is enough to remember the text that caused greatest scandal, *Collettivo prigionieri comunisti delle Brigate rosse* (1980).
- 34 On this hypothesis, see the sentence issued by the investigating judge Palombarini, *Tribunale di Padova* (1981), which is partially published in Palombarini (1982), and Scarpari (1981). For a discussion on the direct transition from *Potere Operaio* to the BR, see the Assistant Public Prosecutor of the Republic, Calogero, Procura della Repubblica di Padova (1981), Galante (1981) and Ventura (1980).
- 35 In contrast to the state's advocacy of the outright rejection as the proper civil response to terrorism, a part of the radical left and some left-wing intellectuals espoused the line of 'non-rejection'. During this period a common slogan expressing this attitude was 'Neither with the state nor with the Red Brigades'.
- 36 Of the members of the first Executive Committee – Curcio, Franceschini, Morlacchi and Moretti – only the last managed to escape arrest in this period. Moreover, by the end of 1976 the greater part of the 'historical' militants both from Milan and Reggio Emilia had been imprisoned. Renato Curcio escaped from Casale prison in February 1975 but was recaptured in January 1976. Margherita Cagol died in a gun battle with the *carabinieri* in June 1976.
- 37 On this point see Rodotà (1984a) and Caselli (1979).
- 38 This term is a reference to the institutional reform introduced by De Gaulle in France.
- 39 The document that claimed responsibility for the Sossi kidnapping stressed, for example, that the action took place on the day of Gianni Agnelli's inauguration as President of the Confindustria.
- 40 Document cited in *Soccorso rosso* (1976) p. 270.
- 41 *Brigate rosse* (1974).
- 42 *Ibid.* p. 180.
- 43 *Ibid.* The document cited continues: 'It is time to break through the web of the past and to overcome the traditional definition of militant anti-fascism. To strike the fascists with every means and in every place is both just and necessary. But today the main contradiction is that posed by the forces of the counter-revolution.'
- 44 The following are among the most tragic assassinations: Marshal Maritano in the hideout of Robbiano of Mediglia; a lance-corporal of the *carabinieri*, D'Alfonso, during the rescue of the industrialist Valerino Gancia at Acqui Terme; the policeman Niedo at Ponte di Brenta; Commander Cusano at Biella; Deputy Police Superintendent, Padovani and Marshal Bazzega in Milan during the raid on the home of a young *brigatista*, Walter Alasia.
- 45 In the period preceding the assassination of the Public Prosecutor of the Republic for Genoa and his bodyguards, the BR carried out four woundings against targets connected with the large factory: Enrico Boffa, head of personnel at Singer; Valerio Di Marco, head of personnel at Leyland-Innocenti; Luigi Solera, doctor at Fiat Mirafiori; and Matteo Palmieri, head of the security forces at Magneti Marelli. A wounding, already noted, of councillor Massimo De Carolis, strikes a political exponent of the DC.
- 46 Cited in *Soccorso rosso* (1976) p. 253. Brescia had been the scene of a neo-fascist bombing three weeks earlier.
- 47 The hypothesis is illustrated by Alessandro Pizzorno in *Mondoperaio* (1978).

- 48 See Ferrajoli (1979). For some starting points on the relationship between the rise of terrorism and the degeneration of collective movements, see Melucci (1978) and Stame (1979).
- 49 Some observations in this direction are in Caselli (1979).
- 50 On this issue see Violante (1984a).
- 51 The history of the NAP has been reconstructed in *Soccorso rosso napoletano* (1976).
- 52 For more exhaustive information on the history of terrorism in West Germany, the USA and Japan, between the end of the 1960s and the beginning of the 1970s, we refer respectively to the work of Irving Fetscher, Ted R. Gurr and Hiroshi Kawahara, in della Porta and Pasquino (1983). For some comparative observations of the three historical cases cited and the Italian case, see Chapter 6 by Gianfranco Pasquino in the same volume (1983).
- 53 *Brigate rosse* (1977) p. 1.
- 54 *Ibid.*, p.4.
- 55 *Ibid.*
- 56 The organizational structure is set out in *Brigate rosse* (1978).
- 57 The BR had already discussed this point in 1975, but the proposal had no concrete consequence.
- 58 *Brigate rosse* (1978) p. 57.
- 59 The term 'terrorismo diffuso' was used to indicate the splintered nature of the phenomenon, with various small and unconnected groups active throughout Italy in the period. The term also refers to the indiscriminate nature of the actions carried out by these groups against targets with no precise objectives.
- 60 Only Moretti, Micaletto, Azzolini, Bonisoli and Gallinari (who escaped from prison in January 1976) were still at large.
- 61 Raffaele Fiore, Riccardo Dura, Luca Nicolotti and Cristoforo Piancone, among others.
- 62 For a reconstruction of the activity of the BR in this phase, we have used Alberti and Caselli (1980); Barbano, Andruetto, Costanzo and Monticelli (1980) and Galleni (1981). We have also referred to the trial records included in *Tribunale di Torino* (1980 and 1982), *Tribunale di Roma* (1981) and *Tribunale di Venezia* (1982).
- 63 In Turin, the sensational case of the wounding of Ghiretto, where the wrong person was wounded by mistake ('guilty' only in so far as he was the twin of the chosen victim), the BR wrote – in the leaflet claiming responsibility for the action – that the mistake made no difference because (as he was still an employee at Fiat) one twin was worth another, even 'politically'.
- 64 We must recall the attack on Galloni, a member of parliament for the DC, and the wounding of two of his bodyguards, which took place at the end of the period.
- 65 Much has been written on the BR's most dramatic crime. See, *inter alia* Bocca (1978) and Moss (1981).
- 66 This ideological shift was directly conditioned by the progressive strengthening of the Rome *colonna*. For example, the 'intervention' in the tertiary sector and in the marginal and alienated proletariat, are pushed for by the entry in the BR of a strong 'spontaneista' component (previously involved in *Autonomia*).
- 67 Among the actions carried out in this period, we should recall the woundings

- of Bruno, the Assistant Editor of *Il Secolo XIX* of Genoa; Montanelli, the editor of *Il Giornale Nuovo* of Milan; and Rossi, the director of television news on the first channel of the RAI.
- 68 From the wounding of Traversi and the killing of Palma and Tartaglione (judges working at the Ministry) to the murders of Cutugno in Turin, De Cataldo in Milan and Santoro in Udine (who all belonged to the prison guard).
- 69 *Brigate rosse* (1978) pp. 41–2.
- 70 *Ibid.*, pp. 42–3 *passim*.
- 71 The Metropolitan Indians, so-called because they identified with and used the symbols of dispossessed American Indians, were a youth sub-culture that emerged in the second half of the 1970s. They were non-violent but carried out 'provocative' public actions.
- 72 Among the events most often referred to by the media at the time are the death of two young people – Francesco Lo Russo and Giorgiana Masi – during police intervention at public marches; and the incidents which took place at the public meeting held by trade-unionist leader Luciano Lama at the Roman university, La Sapienza (of which there are various contradictory versions). On the dynamics of the transition from political violence to militancy in clandestine groups, see Calvi (1982), Stajano (1982) and Chapter 6 in this volume.
- 73 See for example, Acquaviva (1979a).
- 74 *Brigate rosse* (1978) p. 44.
- 75 Bonanate (1979a) p. 177.
- 76 A connection between terrorism and alienation was established in Ferrarotti (1979). In other cases the hypothesis is put forward of a relationship between the discontent produced by the increase in youth unemployment and the development of political terrorism: see, for example, Cavalli (1977). Neither of the two interpretations, with respect to the available data, is able to give an exhaustive explanation for a phenomenon peculiar to Italy and whose origins must, therefore, be sought in the specific interweaving of preconditions and causal factors of the last twenty years or so of Italian history.
- 77 A good description of the reality of the fights inside the 'tormented archipelago of subversion' is given by one of its protagonists: 'the risk, and at the same time the limit [of this reconstruction] is that there was, or there is, something which brings together, structures, has moments of coordination: but this often passes through conflicts, power struggles, perhaps even the 'worst things'. I mean to say that these aggregations are processes which are not at all linear or painless. They are tiring processes, the power struggle is inherent to them, not only among different organizations, but sometimes also within the same organization: rivalry between 'chiefs', sometimes of a personal nature, under the cover of the language of politics.'
- 78 In the analysis of Cacciari (1980) p. 67.
- 79 *Brigate rosse* (1980) p. 6.
- 80 *Detenuti del carcere di Brescia* (1982) p. 6.
- 81 Note between the spring and summer of 1981, the four kidnappings, carried out simultaneously, of the regional assessor, Ciro Cirillo, the head of Montedison, Giuseppe Taliercio, an Alfa Romeo manager, Renzo Sandrucci and Roberto Peci, the brother of the *brigatista pentito*.
- 82 *Detenuti del carcere di Brescia* (1982) p. 6. A wide range of political, social and

- cultural forces carried out a series of initiatives designed to reduce the area of indifference or sometimes of support for the armed struggle. Among them were the hundreds of meetings on terrorism organized at Turin in the factories, the neighbourhoods and in the schools (see Caselli (1981)). The action of these forces contributed to the isolation of the terrorist organization.
- 83 What remained of the Partito-guerriglia after the arrest of its leader, Giovanni Senzani, set up, for example, a *fronte della guerra alla controrivoluzione globale armata* (sub-divided into the following sectors: armed institutions, logistics, SIM-DC/national-international imperialistic politics), and a *fronte di massa* (sub/divided into the following sectors: factory proletariat, tertiary sector proletariat and extra-legal proletariat). In fact the *fronte della guerra* was made up of only two militants, a Milanese and a Sardinian; the latter had been suspended for 'deviation'.
- 84 The information on the criminal activity of the BR in the course of this last period has been taken, apart from the sources already cited, from two documents of the PCI Direction-Section for State Problems (1981 and 1982) and from the daily press for the last two years (1981 and 1982).
- 85 The *brigatista* Liburno was attacked by his ex-companions during a trial in the spring of 1981. In December 1981 a *Prima Linea* militant, Giorgio Soldati, was assassinated in Cuneo prison by the group *Terrore rosso*. The *brigatista* Gargiulo was wounded by other prisoners in Palmi prison at the beginning of 1982. In July 1982, the *brigatista*, Ennio di Rocco, was killed in Trani prison. In December 1982, the *brigatista* Anna Maria Massa was wounded in Voghera prison.
- 86 The murder of Giacumbi, the *procuratore della Repubblica* of Salerno, appears to have been the work of a criminal group that was not yet part of the BR.
- 87 In the period 1980-1, the Walter Alasia group was responsible for three woundings of members of the Alfa Romeo management; the kidnapping of Sandrucci, a director of the Alfa Romeo office for the organization of work; the assassination of Briano, the personnel director of Magneti Morelli and Mazzanti, the technical director of Falck. *Brigatisti* belonging to the Veneto *colonna* were responsible for the murder of two industrial managers from Porto Marghera, the deputy technical director of Petrochimico, Gori, and the director of Montedison, Talierno.
- 88 The DC was attacked repeatedly both for its representatives (note the woundings in Genoa, Milan and Rome and the assassinations of the provincial councillor of Rome, Schettini and the regional assessor for Campania, Amato) and its premises (the break-in at the offices of the Rome committee of the DC in piazza Nicosia).
- 89 Note the kidnapping (with the murder of the bodyguard) of the regional assessor for Campania, Cirillo, in 1981, and the double assassination – once again in Naples – of the regional assessor, Delcogliano, and his driver in 1982.
- 90 'It is significant,' continues the document written by former terrorists 'that in the hot days of the 1979 contract at Fiat [the Turin *colonna* of the BR was still intact] and in the dramatic struggle in 1980 against the sackings and the *cassa integrazione*, the OCC did not have anything to say,' *Detenuti del carcere di Brescia* (1982) p. 5.
- 91 The request for intervention of the imprisoned companions became increasingly pressing. It is sufficient to remember *Comunicato No. 21* of 7 December 1979, issued at the end of the Turin appeal hearing of the *capi*

storici of the organization, and which, with a truculence inversely proportional to the actual residual potential of the organization, promised 'a proletarian class war which [will be] war without quarter, that must be carried on twenty-four hours a day and without the respite of the weekend. Wherever the enemy is, in the factory or in the home, in army barracks or out walking, he must feel himself trapped, spied upon, exposed to the most fantastic and irreversible traps and ambushes.' More immediately, the imprisoned *brigatisti* requested – as has emerged in the memoirs of the ex-militant terrorist Fenzi – their companions to intervene on the *fronte delle carceri*.

92 *Detenuti del carcere di Brescia* (1982) p. 8.

93 It has been noted that the drop of efficiency in the struggle against terrorism was due to the substantial disbanding of the special squads of *carabinieri* and the police after the arrest of the *capi storici* of the BR (see Caselli (1979) p. 241 and 244 *passim*). Only from September 1978, with the creation of an inter-force investigative organism led by General Carlo Alberto dalla Chiesa, do we see a recovery of professionalism and concentration in the fight against terrorism.

94 See the considerations of three German ex-terrorists: Baumann (1976), Klein (1980), and Mahler (1980). See also della Porta (1982).

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